

140 Characters
by Stephen Klinck

It is just after eleven o'clock on a school night. My algebra homework is done, my assigned English reading has been read, and my lab report has been written. A tweet from David Pogue, technology columnist for the *New York Times*, enters my Twitter feed: "Make up a clever title for a sequel to a famous movie," it reads. I begin writing.

Pogue is compiling a book of "crowd-sourced tweets about life, the universe, and other pertinent stuff." Each night he asks a question on Twitter, with the intent of publishing the wittiest, most clever, and most entertaining replies in *The World According to Twitter*. It is my intention for one of my tweets to be amongst these replies. For the next ten minutes, it is my *only* intention.

"Lord of the Ring Dings" I type into the blank white box. I hold down the delete key. *Not clever enough*. "The Godmother" is my next attempt, but that, too, is deleted. "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang Bang" comes to mind next. *Good*, I say to myself. *I can work with this*.

I add a period. "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. Bang" is the next iteration. *It needs something more*, I mumble, still not happy with the precise appearance of the words on the screen. I then experience an epiphany, an epiphany that will transform this tweet from good to great, from unpublishable to publishable, from not funny to funny. I add another period.

I review the exact appearance, order, and sound of the words on the screen: "Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. Bang." I read it aloud several times, doing my best to imagine how most readers would read the tweet, how it would sound to their minds, how it would look to their eyes. I give it my final approval, hit submit, and start again. There are more tweets to be written.

Language is how I communicate. Some people have the dribble of a basketball to express who they are and where they are going. Others have the grass stains on their soccer uniforms. I have a Twitter account.

It saddens me to see a Facebook comment wasted with an "lol" or the potency of a status update diluted by song lyrics. I treat a wall post as writing that must be just as well crafted as an essay for history class. I view text messages as enormously capable of sending exactly the right message in exactly the right way. I owe it to my audience to ensure they hear exactly what I hear when I read the two sentence post in my head. It is my passion. It is my art.

History forces you to describe what happened in writing, and to reinforce your analysis by supplementing the truth with language. Science forces you to devise excuses for invalid results. In each of these subjects, I play with words. But in each of these instances, the manipulation of language is a tool, a tool to preserve scientific integrity, a tool to help support historical conclusions. Only with Facebook and Twitter and text messaging is the manipulation

of language not a tool but the goal. Only with Facebook and Twitter and text messaging can the true reason why I write be revealed.

It is late July, and I have finally received my free copy of *The World According to Twitter*. “Thanks, co-author!” the cursive on the inside cover of the book reads. I thumb through some of the 2,521 tweets that are not my own. I admire the placement of the periods in one tweet. I appreciate the vocabulary choices made in another. “Compose the subject line of an email message you really, really don’t want to read,” is the title of page sixteen. @SusanEJacobsen gets it. “I hate to do this via email...” is her tweet. *Genius*.

The truth is I didn’t need this essay to demonstrate why I write. One glance at my Facebook page, with all of its social statements disguised as status updates, “likes” that inspire me to keep posting, and comments containing no spelling or punctuation errors and one can clearly see I do not simply aim to be a writer. I aim to be an artist. An artist who enjoys the process of creating the art as much as the art itself.

I didn’t need this essay to demonstrate why I write. I really only needed 140 characters.